



FEMA

South Padre Island: Living with Mother Nature's Wrath

South Padre Island, TX - Jay Mitchim has weathered his job in South Padre Island's building department for more than 20 years—longer than many of the buildings in this town known as the “Tropical Tip of Texas.” These buildings have survived some of Mother Nature's toughest tests.

Now the town's chief building official, Mitchim speaks of the island's buildings with personal affection, as if he were describing his children. So he watched with interest July 23, 2008 when Hurricane Dolly stormed ashore as a Category 2 storm with winds estimated at between 100 and 140 miles per hour and rain totaling 12 to 15 inches.

“I have often wondered how the new buildings, built on my watch, would hold up to a storm,” he said. “There's a lot of damage, but there's not a lot of structural damage to the newer buildings. They did pretty well.”

A case in point is City Hall, completed just before Hurricane Dolly. It fared very well with just minor water damage from rain that came through and under a door.

City Hall is a shiny new building, colorful and very pleasant, with generous impact-resistant windows that fill the rooms with sun and light. But on closer inspection, it is also a vault. It has a concrete, monolithic-pour roof deck, and its floors and ceilings are poured concrete with concrete blocks filled between the massive columns.

“This building is equipped with an on-site generator and was built to weather a moderate storm, the kind we just had with Dolly,” Mitchim said. “The entire two-story City Hall is built 10 feet above sea level. That's two feet higher than the code requirement. Why? To build in an extra measure of safety for this critical public building near the sea.”



Cameron County,
Texas



Quick Facts

Sector:

Public

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Building Codes

Primary Funding:

Local Sources